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What are some of the health risks associated with obesity?

Obesity is defined in terms of body fat in relation to lean body mass, a ratio that is measured by body mass index (BMI). Individuals with a BMI of 25 – 29.9 are considered overweight, while individuals with a BMI of 30 or more are considered obese.

Much emphasis is placed on physical appearance, and obesity can lead to feelings of rejection, depression and lasting emotional scars. In addition, obesity is associated with a higher risk for a number of serious health conditions:

- **Heart disease and stroke.** Obesity often leads to hypertension, or high blood pressure, which is a major contributor to stroke and heart disease. Obese individuals also tend to have higher levels of cholesterol in the bloodstream, which can also lead to heart disease.
- **Diabetes.** Type 2 diabetes is characterized by higher than normal amounts of blood sugar. Even moderate obesity brings with it an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Weight loss and exercise can help to reduce this risk as well as to help control diabetes for those already inflicted with the disease.
- **Cancer.** Recent studies have suggested that certain types of cancer are associated with obesity. Obese men are at elevated risk of developing cancer of the colon, rectum and prostate, while obese women are at elevated risk of developing cancer of the breast, cervix, uterus and ovaries.
- **Gallstones and gallbladder disease.** Gallstones are clusters of solid material that form in the gallbladder. They are made mostly of cholesterol and can sometimes cause abdominal or back pain. People who are overweight may produce more cholesterol, which increases the risk for developing gallbladder disease and gallstones. Obesity may also contribute to an enlarged gallbladder, which may not work properly.
- **Lung and breathing problems.** Obesity can impede the muscles that inflate and ventilate the lungs. Obese individuals may have to work hard to get enough air and over time may not be able to take in the oxygen needed by all body cells.

Breathing problems can make even the simplest of daily activities more difficult, leading to decreased activity levels.

- **Arthritis.** Excess weight stresses vulnerable joints, particularly in the back, hips and knees. This extra stress can lead to the development of osteoarthritis, a condition that can lead to pain, stiffness and loss of mobility.

Sleep apnea. This condition occurs when breathing stops for several seconds during the sleep cycle. In obese individuals, increased amounts of fat may lead to constriction of the airway. Sleep apnea can result in daytime drowsiness and, over time, can lead to heart failure and death.

Call us for the support that you need. 1-888-290-4EAP (TDD: 1800-697-0353) or go to www.GuidanceResources.com. Agency ID: FEDSOURCE

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